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ABSTRACT

The report summarizes findings and recommendations of a project designed to promote transfer of training in basic skills from school to community for mildly retarded secondary students. Project objectives (including learning to drive, read schedules, work with others, and shop for groceries) are listed along with brief discussions of staffing, curriculum, and evaluation methods. Among evaluation results presented are that students demonstrated improved attitudes about their own self worth, decisionmaking, and problem solving; and students demonstrated practical application of the skills trained. Cited are findings regarding academic achievement, student attitudes, and attitudes toward the world of work. Among recommendations offered are the review of student selection procedures for alternate programs, the training of school personnel in procedures for altering student attitudes to the work world, and examining the practicality of transfer programs for rural areas. (CL)

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Community Entry Skills Program

Summary

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COMMUNITY ENTRY SKILLS PROGRAM
SUMMARY

- by -

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Completed under contract to
Rocky Mountain School Division #15

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by

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REPORT ON THE COMMUNITY ENTRY SKILLS PROGRAM

ROCKY MOUNTAIN HOUSE SCHOOL DIVISION #15

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the extent to which a program designed to effect a transfer of skills to practical situations would be successful.

The program was conducted for a three-year period and was designed specifically for junior and senior high school students of low intellectual ability in the educably mentally handicapped range. A somewhat unique feature of the program was a community worker in addition to the staff of teacher and para-professional. Another feature of the program was the emphasis on practical applications of all skills learned and the degree to which instruction was arranged in community settings rather than in the classroom.

The evaluation included information from the target group and comparison groups also enrolled in alternative programs. Changes in academic achievement and attitudes were determined and were supplemented by subjective assessments of the actual independent functioning of the students.

Results suggest that transfer of basic skills to practical situations was highly successful. Personal attitudes changed in a positive manner. However, attitudes toward the world of work changed in a negative manner. The data suggest that inappropriate student placement in alternate programs may have occurred. There was little difference between the changes for the various groups studied in regard to the learning of basic skills (reading, mathematics and spelling), attendance, percentage attrition rates, and parental support. Major differences occurred for the target program group in improvements in personal attitude and in the excellent transfer of skills to life situations.

Recommendations include reference to further studies of programs specifically teaching for transfer of skills, follow-up of students in these programs in three years time, a review of student selection for alternate programming, well-defined criteria for student selection, and a training module for schools to assist in altering student attitudes toward employment.

Conclusions of the study are positive regarding successful completion of the following objectives: transfer of skills; mastery of life management training; and demonstrated application of listed objectives. The conclusions of the study are indecisive regarding the effectiveness of this program in terms of measurable returns for effort expended, even though most of the objectives were met and it appears transfer was successful. The number of man hours, the modifications required and the specificity of the training required suggest that the program was extremely expensive in terms of the benefits obtained.

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OVERVIEW

Community Entry Skills Program was a program designed to provide alternative schooling for non-academic students in grades 7, 8, 9, and 10. These students had experienced failure in the regular program due primarily to low ability and were primarily in the educable mentally handicapped category. The most unique feature of the program was the supervision and training of transfer of skills from the classroom to the practical life setting in the community. The program was studied over a three year period.

BACKGROUND

The need to modify programs for educable mentally handicapped in small communities is necessary due to the failure of these students to successfully transfer urban training to a practical rural setting. The program began in one room of a middle school, where it continued the second year. The original group of students moved to a high school for level three, while the middle school continued to house the level one and two portions of the curriculum. Each year students entered at all three levels in an attempt to maintain them near their chronological peer levels.

PROJECT DESIGN

1. Objectives

The primary goal was to train students to be self sufficient, contributing members of the small rural community. A second goal was to inform the community of the worth of these potential citizens. A variety of objectives and topic areas were outlined in an attempt to structure the program toward meeting the primary goal. These objectives included the following:

a. to learn to drive.

b. to learn skills of employment interviewing.

c. to learn to read schedules.

d. to learn the use of newspapers (want ads, weather, job search).

e. to learn to work with others.

f. to learn oral communication skills (listening, explaining, using telephone).

g. to learn hygiene.

h. to learn to tell time (counting, numbers).

i. to learn to count money (counting, reading prices, sequencing).

j. to learn budgeting (saving, credit, buying good value).

k. to learn the sources of assistance available in community (R.C.M.P., fire department, clinic, drug store, dentist, hospital, public health, banking facilities).

l. to learn to cook (measurement, shopping, directions, reading recipes).

m. to learn to care for clothing (laundry, repairs, appropriateness).

n. to learn child care practices.

o. to learn basic essential vocabulary.

p. to develop a positive self-image as independence increases.

q. to develop a sexuality and family planning knowledge.

r. to learn to shop for groceries.

s. to learn to shop for clothing.

t. to learn recreational activities (swimming, golf, cross-country skiing).

u. to learn essentials of environmental education.

The program developers believed the students achievement of the stated objectives would be judged in terms of the following types of growth:

a. That the target individuals would become self sufficient and employed.

b. That the community would be more knowledgeable and accepting of the exceptional members within the community.

c. That employment opportunities would be increased to include not only service occupation jobs, but also jobs within a wider range of occupation.

d. That skills taught formally could be transferred to practical situations to provide the competency required to ensure success of expected outcomes 1, 2, and 3.

e. That, if successful, this type of transition program could become a permanent feature of rural communities, rather than remaining within the reach of only a few urban centres.

f. That individuals will receive the opportunity of becoming participating community members and experience the dignity of being self-sufficient.

2. Student Selection

Students were selected using the following guidelines:

-target students were defined as educable mentally handicapped

-inclusion was determined by poor achievement, I.Q. below 75±5, parental approval and recommendation of school personnel.

3. Staffing, Space and Facilities

The curriculum was divided into three levels. Levels one and two were housed in a middle school containing Grades 6, 7, and 8. The initial target group out-grew the middle school after the second year. They were relocated in a high school for the third year of the program (level three). The middle school continued to offer levels one and two of the program for new entrants. Access to a kitchen area with sink, stove, refrigerator, microwave, cooler and deep freeze was necessary. Use was made of school facilities such as: gym, industrial arts, home economics, playground, office equipment, etc. Use of community facilities included: arena, swimming pool, bowing alley, tennis courts, golf course, hospital, senior citizens drop-in centre, day cares, kindergartens, park areas, camping sites, lakes, ski hills, etc.

The program was designed to include 20 students being served by 1 teacher, 1 paraprofessional and a community worker. This arrangement was successful for the first two years. The third year of the program saw an expansion of level three to the high school. The decision was made to curtail the staffing to 2 teachers and 2 paraprofessionals spread between the two programs. The position of community worker was eliminated. The program during year three had the potential of serving 40 students with 4 staff members. Student attrition kept the pupil-teacher ratio much lower.

4. Curriculum

The curriculum was designed to provide specific training in life skills required to function independently in the community. Topics included budgeting, consumer training, cooking, home making, child care, communication, decision making, etc. Individual project topics could be chosen according to student interest. Areas included were hog raising, cattle ranching, small engine repair etc. A large percentage of the curriculum time was devoted to handling money and to learning recreational skills. Completion of each topic occurred as mastery was effected.

5. Evaluation Methods

The initial target group and all students entering the program during years 2 and 3 of the study were included. Three control populations were also included. It was not possible to match the control groups completely, therefore groups were chosen for similar characteristics such as comparable size communities, similar I.Q's, alternate programming.

Assessment instruments included comparison of age and I.Q., attrition rates, attendance, Wide Range Achievement Test, Attitudes Towards the World of Work, Student Attitude Survey, Parent Questionnaire, descriptive summary of skills achieved, observation of objectives attained as listed in the curriculum overview.

Measurements were taken of all groups at the end of the first and third year. Measurements of the target group and the control group three were also taken during year two.

EVALUATION RESULTS

Employers, teachers, parents and others who were involved with the Community Entry Skills Program levels one and two, felt the program was generally successful, especially when these students would have experienced very little success in a regular school program. The program was successful in several ways:

1. Students achieved success in meeting objectives outlined in the curriculum.

2. Employers continued to be supportive over the three years in spite of decreased availability of jobs. Students continued to have job placements.

3. Students demonstrated practical application of the skills trained by completing a variety of projects designed to challenge mastery and test integration of the skills trained.

4. Students were able to successfully participate in a variety of recreational activities designed for individual and family involvement.

5. Students demonstrated an improved attitude about their own self worth and about their ability to decision make and problem solve.

6. Students demonstrated a feeling of belonging in the community by their involvement in the community and their acceptance of responsibility toward specific aspects of the community such as public buildings, parks, persons requiring assistance in the community.

7. The attendance of these students was high even though attrition also tended to be high.

The following statistical information also serves to evaluate success of the program.

Academic Results

Administration of the WRAT to all students at the end of year one, and at the end of year three, provided a measure of academic progress. The results are limited, however, because the following variables could not be controlled: the number of students in the sample was very small;

few students remained in the project for the three year time period; and of great significance, the goals and objectives of the teacher teaching the initial target group for the last year of the study changed dramatically. During no point in the three years was there a significant increase in grade equivalent achievement. See Table 1.

Certain outcomes were noted:

1. Reading grade equivalent scores were consistently approximately one year beyond the spelling grade equivalent scores.

2. Spelling grade equivalent scores were consistently approximately one year above the mathematics grade equivalent scores.

3. The least variability of student scores within groups was in the mathematics area.

4. Unusual outcomes included the failure of ability to predict achievement level for Control Group One.

Student Attitude Survey Results

During the third year of the study, the students' self perceptions changed significantly in a positive direction for the following groups:

- Target group 2 and 3 (in the program for 2 and 3 years at level 1 and level 2 of the curriculum).

- Control group one and control group three (see Table 3)

Students remaining in the study over the three year period were compared between years one and two and between years two and three. These students, considered most similar.

The students considered most similar, initial target group one (in the program for the full three years and the initial control group 2 in the study for 3 years) showed no significant change in any comparisons of the three years results. It is speculated that the groups were too small (N of 4: N of 2) to reasonably measure change. See Table 2.

Attitudes Toward the World of Work Results

The students in all programs unanimously felt that getting and holding a job is outside the control of the individual.

The initial target group in the program for 3 years, demonstrated a less positive attitude towards the work world than did students in the program for only two years. The shift of the goals away from the working world during the target group's last year may have contributed to the generally negative perceptions of the work world held by these students. This becomes more probable as the positive feelings of the target group with one and two years in the program are compared.

TABLE 1: AVERAGE GRADE EQUIVALENT SCORES FOR THE INITIAL TARGET AND INITIAL CONTROL STUDENTS STILL REMAINING IN THE PROGRAMS: READING, SPELLING AND ARITHMETIC FOR FIRST AND THIRD YEAR OF STUDY

	READING					SPELLING					ARITHMETIC				
	1981		1983			1981		1983			1981		1983		
	N	$\bar{X}$	N	$\bar{X}$	Diff*	N	$\bar{X}$	N	$\bar{X}$	Diff*	N	$\bar{X}$	N	$\bar{X}$	Diff*
Target 1 (Initial Target Group)	3	5.8	3	6.2	.4	3	3.5	3	4.8	1.3	3	3.5	3	4.8	1.3
Control 2	2	4.7	2	5.1	.4	2	1.9	2	4.2	2.3	2	4.1	2	3.4	(-.7)

*not significant at the $p<.05$ level

TABLE 2: CHANGES IN STUDENT ATTITUDE DURING 1980-81 AND 1982-83

1980-1981					1982-83				
Group	Statistic	Pre Measure	Post Measure	Change*	Group	Statistic	Pre Measure	Post Measure	Change*
Target #1	N	4	4		Target #1	N	4	4	
	$\bar{X}$	92.8	100.5	7.75		$\bar{X}$	94.0	93.25	-0.75
	SD	4.86	1.0			SD	6.0	6.55	
Control #2	N	2	2		Control #2	N	2	2	
	$\bar{X}$	86.5	91.5	5.00		$\bar{X}$	86.5	88.5	2.00
	SD	0.70	3.53			SD	3.53	6.36	

* not significant @p $<$.05 (one-tailed tests)

TABLE 3: STUDENT ATTITUDE SURVEY RESULTS - YEAR THREE: ALL GROUPS

POPULATION		PRE-MEASUREMENT	POST-MEASUREMENT	CHANGE SCORE
Target Group 1 (Initial Target Pop in Program for 3rd year)	MEAN	93.11	94.5	1.4
	S.D.	6.01	6.02	
Target Group 2 and 3	MEAN	83.5	100.2	16.7*
	S.D.	9.41	7.98	
Control Group One	MEAN	82	89.8	7.7*
	S.D.	5.7	5.19	
Control Group Two	MEAN	94.4	99.5	5.12
	S.D.	10.11	11.5	
Control Group Three	MEAN	83.5	94.8	11.3*
	S.D.	9.42	4.96	

* - significant @p $<$ .05 level

Some scales showed no change for the initial target group over three years. These scales included the poor school preparation for employment, the students' failure to value diligent work, the high valuing of job security over other job features, the belief that independence is not a priority, the perception that getting and holding a job is outside the control of the student, the general lack of self confidence in getting and holding a job, the acceptance of unemployment as normal, and a generally negative and pessimistic attitude towards earning a living. For this group, changes in attitudes occurred in the following scales:

-the students now seek more interesting and varied positions

-they have an increased attitude of wanting as much as possible for as little effort as possible

-they view employers less positively

-money has become more important

-these students view friends as being more important now than in seeking job success

-these students now view social relations as being important to job satisfaction.

These response patterns are similar to other studies involving this type of student. A major conclusion is that curricula should be modified.

Considerable attention should be given to developing curriculum which addresses the following attitudes:

1. job preparation by the school;
2. interest and variability of job;
3. diligence as a virtue;
4. independence regarding job satisfaction;
5. money regarding job satisfaction;
6. locus of control in obtaining and maintaining a job;
7. employer characteristics and needs.

Many of the underachieving students share similar beliefs and attitudes related to the work world.

Parents Opinion Questionnaire

The parent questionnaire had a lower total response rate (20%) for the last year, as compared with the first year response rate of 100% for the target population and 20% for control populations. The parent responses for the last year were equally distributed among the various populations.

Generally they felt the students had changed positively in the following areas: cooperativeness, ability to perform household tasks, and better money sense. The perception of target student parents was higher than the control student parents in their perceptions of their children having better social skills, and having more positive attitudes towards school. No parents saw their children as having adequate training to live independently at this time.

Attendance Comparisons

Over-all attendance in the program improved steadily with each year of the study, suggesting the programs were meeting a felt need of these students. The high turnover in the Rocky Project Experience program, Control Group Three suggests inappropriate screening and student selection. It is possible that the original screening procedures were being ignored over the length of the study.

The increased attendance may also have been influenced by the scarcity of jobs and money, as the economic situation worsened over the three year study.

Achievement Demonstrating Application of Life Situations

The target population years 2 and 3 (students within the curriculum level one and two) demonstrated several examples of mastery and transference of skills. These included:-

-catering a noon banquet for 200 teachers;
-the successful management of a school confectionary;
-a regular once-a-week hot lunch program;
-participating successfully and using appropriately a variety of community recreational facilities;
-maintaining a steady supply of repeat employers.

The target population has not been able to demonstrate complete independence due to the short time line. The need for a follow-up in 3 years time is required to more accurately measure success of transfer to practical living.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

The Community Entry Skills Program was a very popular program. The pressure to include non-achieving higher functioning students soon caused a shift in the characteristics of the program due to the school compliance with parental demands.

Attrition of students from all programs was high due to the nature of the students. Low numbers of students at the outset of the study meant that it was difficult to use statistical data, especially with high attrition over three years.

Data gathering was occasionally very fragmentary. The control populations out of district were most cooperative. The greatest problem occurred in the initial target population for the last year of the program, (level 3).

Divergence of goals and objectives away from the original defined goals and objectives also caused difficulties in level three of the target population. This inconsistency can be attributed to changing staff and the relocation of the program into a high school setting.

CONCLUSIONS

Little gain was made in academic achievement.

Attitudes toward work altered in a negative direction.

Attendance for all programs was good to excellent.

Parental support was good for all programs, but parents failed to demonstrate continued involvement once the programs demonstrated even a small success with their children.

Intelligence scores increased in all but one program, suggesting that these programs may well be using inappropriate selection and placement procedures.

Students retention in the program is low, suggesting they may be used as a funnel out of the educational system.

Significant increased self-esteem was a factor in the target program. The target program did achieve very considerable positive changes in skills application to life situations.

The first two years of the target program appear to have met most of the objectives listed in the curriculum. Best met were:

- the mastery of most of the skills outlined for level one and two of the program;
- the excellent transfer of these skills to practical situations;
- the supportiveness of employers for the program evidenced by the continued availability of jobs;
- the continued presence of these students in the community;
- the appropriateness with which these students use recreational facilities;
- the positive changes in these students' attitudinal responses.

The goals successfully met include:

- acceptance and awareness by the community of these students' worth;
- broadening of jobs from service into the helping areas;
- excellent transfer of skills to the practical.

Un-met goals include:

- demonstrated self sufficiency;
- full time employment;
- permanent entrenchment of the program.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. There be a review of student selection procedures for alternate programs.

2. There be training provided for school personnel in procedures for altering students' attitudes towards the work world; with emphasis on job preparedness, place of diligence in job maintenance, employment opportunities, control of student over obtaining and maintaining a job, understanding the employer's situation.

3. There be further study of modified programs emphasizing transfer to determine practicality for rural areas.

4. There be a follow-up study of the target students in three years, to determine success rates of these students in life situations.

5. There be a study conducted of the characteristics of the type of student now found in alternate programs, and the programming emphasis implemented in alternate programs. The areas of concern to include:

    - rates of attitude change;
    - time lines of peak learning periods;
    - predictions of learning cycles.